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Latin America Review

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**Supplement
26 October 1984**

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Articles

Cuba: Bracing for War?

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Articles have been coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Comments and queries regarding this publication may be directed to the Chief, Production Staff, Office of African and Latin American Analysis

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Articles

Cuba: Bracing for War?

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President Castro appears increasingly anxious about the possibility of US military intervention in Central America, and even an attack on Cuba itself, if President Reagan is reelected. Over the past few months, Castro has stepped up efforts to increase Cuba's defensive preparedness and to make an attack on Cuba as costly as possible to the United States. He also is responding to the perceived threat—and to setbacks beginning with the loss of Grenada—by conducting a propaganda campaign aimed at influencing US allies and the American public, apparently in hopes of dissuading Washington from using military force. Although Castro may be using the pretext of a US attack to prepare the population for some provocative act that could draw US retaliation, it is more likely that he will avoid openly aggressive measures, at least for the near term, to buy time to strengthen Cuba—and Nicaragua—militarily.

Improving Cuba's Defenses

Various Cuban leaders—including Castro—have publicly emphasized in recent weeks their belief that the threat of war with the United States is real.

a senior Cuban official said that Havana fears the United States will take direct military action against Nicaragua and the Salvadoran guerrillas.

a film on civil defense sent to Cuban Communist Party members in August warned of bombardments and an eventual US invasion of Cuba. The film also criticized the performance of Cuban military personnel during the Grenada fighting, adding that in the future Cubans stationed abroad will fight to the death.

Cuba's capability to defend itself has improved considerably during this decade as a result of Soviet



Seventy-year-old member of the Territorial Militia Verde Olivo

arms deliveries and the continuing modernization and expansion of Cuba's armed forces.

In the past year, Cuba's Territorial Militia has grown from 500,000 to more than 1.2 million—more than 10 percent of the population

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[] Militia members—mainly women and others not part of the regular military or reserves—reportedly are receiving guerrilla warfare training to enable them to inflict high casualties on an invading force. Havana also announced recently that all Cubans must devote one day a month, in addition to militia training, to military training in preparation for anticipated US military aggression. []

Havana appears to be preparing the populace—both physically and psychologically—to fight a “people’s war” similar to that waged by the Vietnamese against US forces. Civil defense exercises conducted throughout Cuba in recent months have emphasized “self-defense” of the revolution, probably reflecting Havana’s perception that the USSR would not come to its aid militarily in the event of a US attack. A civil defense exercise that took place last month in Havana—the most extensive seen in over a year, according to the US Interests Section—simulated a massive surprise US air attack and included evacuation drills, treatment of casualties, and training by female militia members. []



Students descending into air raid shelter constructed under schoolyard [] Verde Olivo

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Soviet arms deliveries—larger in each of the past four years than at any time since the peak period of the missile crisis in 1962—have boosted Cuba’s military capabilities. Improvements to Cuba’s Air and Air Defense Force seem designed to make an air attack against Cuba a costly one. []

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Naval training and new equipment—such as submarines and frigates—have improved Cuba’s ability to respond to a blockade or amphibious assault. []

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Havana’s Motives

The US military intervention in Grenada, coupled with US public approval of the action and the lack of a strong Soviet response, probably has caused Castro considerable concern in calculating future US policy. The regime’s costly war preparations suggest Castro has little faith that Moscow would act to deter the United States from attacking Cuba. []

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Havana is worried that the Soviets may be willing to concede the Caribbean to the US sphere of influence. Moreover, the preparations appear to be more than rhetoric designed to distract the populace from its domestic woes. Although Castro has been concerned about US intentions since President Reagan was elected in 1980, the level of effort being expended in these preparations and the recent statements by Cuban officials indicate that Havana sees the threat now as more severe. []

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Significant Cuban Military Acquisitions Since 1981

- *One hundred additional MIG-21 and MIG-23 jet fighters, including Cuba's first MIG-23 interceptor variants.*
- *More than 30 additional combat helicopters, including Cuba's first MI-24 gunships and MI-14 antisubmarine warfare helicopters.*
- *Advanced air defense command and control equipment and several new radar systems.*
- *Two Koni-class frigates, and a third F-class attack submarine.*
- *Eleven additional torpedo boats and guided-missile patrol boats, and several more minesweepers.*
- *Two Polnocny-class amphibious landing ships, Cuba's first.*
- *Approximately 250 medium tanks and 400 artillery pieces.*

Moscow's attention more closely on Central America or to elicit a firmer political commitment from the Soviets regarding Cuba's defense—or at least the provision of more or newer weapon systems. Castro could be paving the way for a reduction of combat forces in Angola, trying to save face by demonstrating they were critically needed at home for Cuba's defense. It is also conceivable—but less likely—that Havana is attempting to influence the US elections by portraying President Reagan as a warmonger and a threat to hemispheric stability. [REDACTED]

There is also a possibility that the extensive defensive preparations foreshadow a provocative move by Havana—such as sending high-performance jet aircraft or Cuban combat units to Nicaragua—that could draw a US military response. If Castro believed that US military intervention in Central America were imminent, he might decide to bolster Sandinista defenses to make such a move as costly as possible to the United States and stave off an attack on Cuba. [REDACTED]

In our view, however, Castro would be unlikely to risk a confrontation at a time when he perceives the US military threat as high and Moscow's support questionable. More likely, he will continue trying to focus international attention on the Central America issue and mobilize public opinion—both in the United States and abroad—as a means of deterring US intervention. [REDACTED]

Cuban Foreign Minister Malmierca admitted earlier this year that everything possible must be done to make the US public aware of the serious danger of war with Cuba. Castro may attempt to do this by denouncing US policy in the region at the United Nations, by inviting world leaders to Cuba to reinforce his policy, and by visiting other capitals to argue his case. [REDACTED]

Castro may, on the other hand, have his own motives for the current campaign. For example, he could be attempting to use the threat of US attack to focus

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